



U.S. AIR FORCE

This Week in USAF and PACAF History 13 – 19 April 2015



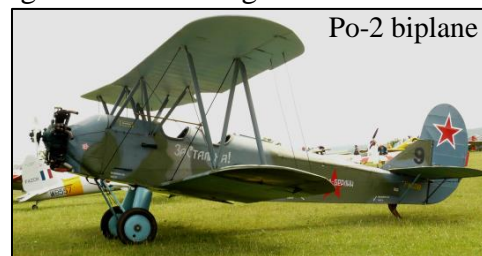
16 April 1916 **The Lafayette Escadrille was established** as a squadron of mostly American volunteer pilots flying and fighting for the French Air Service during World War I. The planes, mechanics, and the pilot uniforms were French, as was the commander, Captain Georges Thenault. The squadron was originally named the *Escadrille Américaine*. For reasons of international diplomacy, the unit was re-named to honor the French military hero who aided the American Army during the American Revolution.



18 April 1943 **Yamamoto Shootdown.** Flying P-38 aircraft over Bougainville Island, 1st Lt. Rex T. Barber and Capt. Thomas G. Lanphier, Jr., intercepted and shot down a Japanese bomber carrying Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto. The interception, meticulously planned and executed on the first anniversary of the Doolittle raid, deprived the Japanese of one of their most brilliant naval officers. Major John W. Mitchell led the flight of 16 P-38s in which Barber and Lanphier flew.

15 April 1953 An enemy air raid on Cho-do Island killed two U.S. soldiers. **Since that night sixty-two years ago, no U.S. servicemen have died in air raids by enemy forces.**

This raid was one of many night harassment missions flown by the North Koreans in propeller-driven light aircraft. Called “Bed-Check Charlie” raids by U.S. forces, these asymmetrical attacks eluded U.S. air defenses by flying at night and low enough to blend into the ground clutter on radar scopes. The enemy used Soviet Po-2 biplanes, La-11 fighters and Yak-18 trainers – aircraft that were too maneuverable and too slow to be engaged by jet interceptors. On the night of 16-17 June, about 15 of these aircraft flew what has been called the most successful North Korean air raid of the war – destroying over five million gallons of fuel at Inchon.



Robert Futrell’s book *The United States Air Force in Korea, 1950-1953* describes Fifth Air

Force’s efforts to counter these North Korean air raids (see pages 662-666). One successful tactic was to borrow four old F4U-5N Corsairs (left) and their U.S. Navy pilots from Task Force 77 to intercept the Bed-Check Charlies. This action produced the Navy’s only ace of the Korean War, [Lt. Guy Bordelon](#). The North Korean air attacks decreased after Fifth Air Force found and bombed the Bed-Check Charlie airfield at Pyongyang.



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19 April 1967 Major Leo K. Thorsness earned the **Medal of Honor** and his backseater, Capt. Harold Johnson earned the **Air Force Cross** by protecting a mission to rescue downed airmen in North Vietnam. Flying an F-105 Wild Weasel, Johnson guided Thorsness in the destruction of two enemy SAM sites. Now low on fuel, they remained in the area to engage enemy fighters. Thorsness shot down a MiG-17, damaged another and drove off three more. The pair then recovered at a forward base to allow another aircraft low on fuel to refuel from an aerial tanker. Shortly after this incident, Thorsness and Johnson were shot down, captured, and held prisoner until 4 March 1973.



14 April 1972 **BATTLE OF AN LOC.** Through 30 June, C-130s airdropped 4,853 tons in 359 sorties to the besieged garrison at An Loc to help prevent a North Vietnamese take over. After losing five aircraft to enemy ground fire, C-130s used high-altitude airdrops for the first time. Flying above the lethal range of enemy anti-aircraft fire, the airdrop effort suffered no further losses. Improvements to the parachute opening mechanisms and payload cushioning helped achieve a 90% effectiveness rate. When the road routes to An Loc reopened on 23 July, the C-130s had flown 763 sorties to deliver 10,081 tons of supplies. B-52 attacks provided essential close air support to embattled troops in An Loc.

16 April 1973 **USAF B-52 bombers resumed attacks against North Vietnamese positions in Laos** following reports that communist forces overran a town in the Plaine des Jarres.

15 April 1974 **CAS Fly-Off.** Under Congressional pressure, the Air Force began a fly-off between the Fairchild A-10 and the LTV A-7D Corsair. The fly-off showed the A-10 to be more capable in the close air support (CAS) mission. The A-10 carried a larger payload and a more lethal gun—the GAU-8 30mm cannon. The A-10 was judged more survivable after being hit by



enemy ground fire and its maneuverability made it less vulnerable to air-to-air losses. Pilots felt the A-10s maneuverability would also be a great asset in providing effective CAS to ground units, especially during limited visibility or low-ceiling weather conditions. The A-10 was named the “Thunderbolt II” after the P-47 of World War II, but it is more commonly known by the nickname “Warthog.”



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14 April 1986 **Operation EL DORADO CANYON.** The U.S. retaliated against Libya for its involvement in terrorism with an airstrike. F-111s flew from RAF Lakenheath to conduct their attacks, supported by five EF-111s from RAF Upper Heyford. Navy aircraft struck Libya from the USS America and USS Coral Sea (14 A-6Es, six A-7s and 12 F/A-18s). The strike aircraft successfully hit targets at Benina Airfield, Benghazi Military Barracks, and Aziziyah Barracks in Tripoli. During a long, circuitous flight around France and Spain, the F-111s were air-refueled by 28 KC-10 and KC-135 tankers, flying out of RAF Fairford and RAF Mildenhall. The tankers refueled the F-111 strike force four times each way, maintaining radio silence during the entire mission. The US lost one F-111 in the attack. On the return flight to the UK, the tankers refueled the F-111s two more times. Read the Air Force Historical Studies fact sheet on the operation [here](#).



Artwork by Ronald Wong



17 April 1999 During Operation ALLIED FORCE, the **RQ-1 Predator (left) made its first flight into a combat zone.** The Predator performed reconnaissance over Serbia.

16 April 2004 **MACKAY TROPHY.** Near Kharbut, Iraq, two USAF HH-60G helicopters were dispatched to rescue the crew of a U.S. Army CH-47 Chinook helicopter that had crashed in a sandstorm. The brown-out conditions left the rescue crews' infrared and night vision goggles ineffective. Flying through multiple surface-to-air missile attacks, the HH-60s flew visual approaches to locate, rescue and evacuate all five Army crash survivors. For their outstanding actions, the HH-60G aircrews earned the Mackay Trophy. (See file photos below – HH-60Gs and brown-out conditions in southwest Asia.) Read a USAF article on the mission [here](#).



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